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JrCOSTEP – Summer 2005
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Albuquerque Area IHS

My name is Erin Harman. I am currently a senior at Eastern Kentucky University in the Environmental Health Program. My JrCOSTEP experience was spent stationed at the Albuquerque Service Unit in New Mexico. Our office provides service to the surrounding pueblo tribes of Sandia, Santa Ana, Isleta, Zia, Jemez, and Ysleta Del Sur. During my internship I was exposed to many areas of public health and had the opportunity to learn from experienced professionals. I was tutored both by staff and pueblo tribal members. I gained an increased appreciation of the culture of American Indian people and the environmental health issues they face.



My summer was spent conducting surveys, vaccinating animals, catching mosquitoes, inspecting water and sewer systems, feasting and learning. After conducting surveys I would enter my findings into IHS's WebEHRS database. This program allows the user to enter survey data online making past and present data readily available to all staff members. Experience was

gained using this program and surveying food service facilities, casinos, community buildings, pools and spas, as well as water and sewer systems within the reservations. Fun was had by administering rabies vaccinations to animals, catching mosquitoes, and feasting.

Feast days are celebrations held by the American Indian people to honor their patron saints. These religious ceremonies include activities viewable by the public such as dancing, selling goods and serving food. We inspected all temporary vendors that were selling food. Occasionally, we were able to join the tribal members in this celebration as they would take us into their homes and graciously feed us. Overall, it was a wonderful experience and extremely eventful.



Although I greatly enjoyed myself the entire summer, it's important to note that throughout the application and hiring process you learn very little about the Public Health Service and the Commissioned Corps. Only through time do the mysteries of the Corps begin to unfold. Mounds of paperwork tend to intimidate and lack of understanding becomes frustrating. However, once informed, it proves to be well worth the effort.

As an Environmental Health JrCOSTEP with the Indian Health Service I was able to broaden my awareness of environmental health, work with talented and professional people, as well as build upon my education through an unforgettable internship. It was an opportunity of a lifetime and an amazing summer job. I would recommend this program to those students who would be interested in pursuing a career in environmental health.